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ABSTRACT

This discussion deals with a new role for the public school instructional supervisor. This new role has generally been referred to as that of a disseminator of research results. In actuality, it would go beyond the role of an informal/formal disseminator. The requirements for skills in research/evaluation methodology are apparent, as is the ability to develop and direct formal in-service training programs and to prepare appropriate dissemination documents that would present research findings in an easy-to-read and concise format. With these new responsibilities, the instructional supervisor would indeed assume the role of an instructional leader in the school division. Another important result of assuming these new roles would be the bridging of the gap between the educational researchers and the practitioners. Bridging this gap is the key to a more effective relationship between the educational researcher and the practitioner and is considered a most necessary step in attempting to achieve the real goal of education--the best possible educational experience for today's youth. (Author)

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THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPERVISOR IN THE DISSEMINATION OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

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Educational Research: The Promise and the Product

The growth of the educational research profession has paralleled the growth of federal aid to education. Beginning with the Elementary and Secondary Act--1965, federal aid to educational research and development activities increased drastically through the late '60's and into the early '70's. Similar patterns of growth in federal aid were also evidenced in the R&D activities in other areas, such as defense, environment, transportation and crime prevention. In these other areas, however, the growth in federal aid is continuing through the mid '70's, while federal aid to education is on the wane.

Many reasons have been presented for the decline in federal support for educational research and development. Halperin (1975) pointed out that the ESEA can be credited with many positive results, including spotlighting the needs of children, promoting the accountability movement, recruiting quality personnel and moving toward equality of education. However, in this present era of questioning and disillusionment in many aspects of our contemporary society, the public is very skeptical of federal support for educational research and development. Public education in general, as well as educational R&D in particular, are especially vulnerable to criticism because of the key role that education is to play in the improvement of society. The extent of this role will of course be debated for years; however, it has been implied that ESEA, as well as other federally funded programs, have not been overly successful in the attempt to improve

society. Most specifically, present data tend to indicate that the overall academic performance by students participating in these various programs has not been raised as some may have expected (Halperin, 1975). Brademas (1974) indicated that many members of Congress are uncertain about the meaning and value of educational research. Evans (1974) blames this type of attitude on the lack of an appropriate evaluation of the various programs. Without such evaluations, decisions made for initiating, continuing or terminating these programs are somewhat lacking in effectiveness. Those who make these decisions are at fault for their shallow judgment, while the R&D community is at fault for not being more concerned with the production of evaluation results.

It seems that educators and laymen alike have relied too heavily upon "Timpane's Law":

> . . . if there is enough interest in some problem to support a major social experiment, then the interest will be so great that no one will be willing to wait for the conclusion of the experiment before passing legislation to implement a national program (Evans, 1974; Timpane, 1970).

This tendency of people to operate by Timpane's Law supersedes all logical processes, especially in the case where research results are unpleasant for the decision-maker. However, proper use of results by the decision-maker is paramount in order to change the public sentiment toward education and educational R&D.

Three major shortcomings of educational R&D in the improvement of educational practices have been pointed out by Klausmeier (1972). The first of these is the expectation of too much too quickly. While this is a common shortcoming in all R&D activities, educational R&D

was most certainly no exception. Overnight results in improving the academic performance of school children participating in the various programs was given an unrealistically high priority.

A second shortcoming was the initial lack of experience in R&D activities by the education profession. Since 1965, much experience has been gained; however, much more experience will be necessary.

The third, and perhaps the most important, shortcoming of educational R&D has been the problem of poor communication, both internal and external. In the early years of increased federal support, the major emphasis was on R = Research and D = Development with limited consideration given to D = Dissemination. The lack of emphasis on dissemination has been widely documented. It would therefore seem paramount to consider not only R&D activities but also the dissemination of the results of these activities (i.e., R&D&D) in order to broaden the support for continued federal aid to education.

Educational R&D Versus Educational R&D&D

Those involved in the educational R&D activities have been somewhat separated from the actual practitioners of education--the teachers--with little communication between the two groups. Morgan (1968) pointed out that the typical classroom teacher is relatively unfamiliar with the educational R&D activities funded by the federal government. Under this condition, it is virtually impossible for the teachers to benefit from the R&D activities. It is hypothesized that through concerted dissemination activities a closer link between educational researchers and practitioners would be possible as well as beneficial to both groups. This alliance, however, would be

possible only with the proper climate of acceptance from both groups (Loveless, 1966). Such a climate would involve teachers, administrators and school board members not only tolerating R&D activities but also encouraging them and becoming actively involved. Researchers, on the other hand, must be willing to confide in the practitioners and to work with them. This type of working relationship is essential to the growth and the maximization of R&D activities. It would provide the researchers with knowledge of the problems which are the major concerns of the practitioners and would also provide an easily acceptable research setting for gathering pertinent information. The practitioners would be able to work cooperatively toward solutions of these problems and would gain a clearer understanding of the research process.

In theory, the idea of a working and communicative relationship between the researcher and the practitioner sounds very promising. The process of obtaining research data and providing feedback of results as a method of using research findings to solve actual educational problems would be invaluable to both parties (Baldridge, et al., 1974). However, the classroom teacher is usually burdened with day-to-day teaching responsibilities and does not have time to seek out research results and/or assist in the design of elaborate research studies to solve classroom problems. The qualified/experienced (or even inexperienced) educational researcher is generally not readily available at the appropriate time for the dissemination/design assistance. Hence, the feasibility of this working relationship is greatly reduced.

It is the purpose of this paper to explore a possible alternative to the dilemma of how the researcher and the practitioner can share and use the results of educational R&D activities. This alternative relies upon the utilization of already established personnel within the school divisions--the instructional supervisors--performing their duties in a little different context. Most specifically, the instructional supervisor will be considered as the key link between the researcher and the practitioner in the dissemination of the results of educational R&D activities.

Educational Research and the Instructional Supervisor

The public school supervisor has historically been expected to perform the following functions:

(a) providing leadership for developing, improving, and maintaining effective learning opportunities for children and youth--which means giving attention to content selection, teaching methods, materials and evaluation, both inside and outside the classroom;

(b) providing leadership in designing effective ways of working with teachers and other members of the school staff to achieve the first function (Whittier, 1969).

In general, the actual duties of the supervisor vary from one school division to another and are not necessarily consistent within a single school division. This inconsistency is somewhat a function of whether the supervisor is in a staff or line position and of the degree of authority he actually holds. The resulting confusion is existent in the minds of the supervisors, as well as those with whom they work directly (Marchak, 1970; Prigmore, 1969). Thus it would appear that an important first step would be to clarify the role of

the supervisor, specifically as it relates to the dissemination of educational R&D activities.

In clarifying the role of the instructional supervisor, it might be necessary initially to consider the experimental and academic qualifications for this role. Regarding the former, it is imperative for the supervisor to have had several years of experience as an effective teacher and in those years to have been recognized for instructional effectiveness. The academic qualifications vary from state to state; however, the contemporary supervisor most probably holds the minimum of a master's degree. This minimum requirement is presently being raised as a result of legislation in various states. Such legislation, implemented through the respective state departments of education, requires the school divisions to encourage their supervisory staff to pursue more advanced degrees. These requirements could be met through courses and internship experiences in curriculum development, instructional planning, administration, educational psychology/learning theory, research and evaluation, as well as substantial work in a subject area. The research and evaluation courses/internship experiences would be important components of this advanced preparation, if one of the supervisor's responsibilities is to disseminate results of educational R&D activities. Such experiences should provide the supervisor with an understanding of the nature of the research process; with the necessary skills to be a more efficient consumer and disseminator of research findings; and with the necessary skills to participate in research investigation with more highly trained educational researchers and to become a member of the evaluation team for evaluating programs under his jurisdiction.

With regard to Whittier's two general functions of the instructional supervisor the well-qualified instructional supervisor would be able to perform these roles more effectively if he also acts as the disseminator of the results of educational R&D activities. Although the contemporary supervisor has rarely taken a leading role in educational research, development and dissemination (Marchak, 1970; Prigmore, 1969), Wilson et al. (1969) suggest that the supervisory role is ready for new dimensions; and they mention the area of R&D&D as a possibility.

The R&D&D role for the instructional supervisor is quite logical. The supervisor is responsible for "developing, improving and maintaining" effective learning environments and thereby is responsible for providing suggestions to teachers and administrators regarding the most effective methods to accomplish these tasks. Within this responsibility would be the possibility of conducting modest research investigations directed toward solving very important and pressing problems of the classroom teachers within the school division, without regard for the need for widespread generalizations. With the appropriate research/evaluation skills along with the encouragement of the decision-makers in the school division, the instructional supervisor potentially can close the gap between the educational R&D community and the educational practitioner.

As was mentioned above, the teachers are usually closest to the real problems in education and thus are the greatest potential users of the results of educational research. However, the teachers are also usually the least informed in this regard. The instructional

supervisor, as an educational leader for the respective subject area teachers, is in an advantageous position to provide the teachers with the most relevant and current research findings. This dissemination function could greatly enhance communication among the various constituencies of the educational community and could also provide a means for improving the educational opportunities for children.

As an educational leader, the instructional supervisor is in a position to provide both formal and informal in-service training for teachers. The above discussion has been primarily oriented toward the informal aspects of the potential in-service opportunities for teachers. More formal in-service activities could potentially involve structured courses/programs developed and directed by the supervisor. With the growing trend for school divisions to give Continuing Education Units (CEU) for such courses, the school division is afforded the opportunity to provide in-service activities oriented toward the special needs of the division, with the activities being directed by local personnel. These formal in-service activities could be designed to disseminate the most current and relevant research findings. Chandler (1972) found that utilization of educational research findings was most effective when tied to in-service training programs. Thus, with these types of opportunities available (assuming that such in-service activities would be encouraged by the school division), the instructional supervisor could possibly be very effective as the disseminator of educational research findings.

Teacher resistance is a factor which cannot be overlooked. Despite all attempts to provide information on new methods and materials for instructional improvement, some teachers are reluctant

to consider anything new and/or different or to give any credibility to research findings. Additionally, some teachers fail to accept the supervisor as an instructional leader, due to the previously mentioned problem of role definition. However, if the supervisor assumed the role of a non-threatening, genuinely-interested aid to the teacher and demonstrated knowledge of and appreciation for current research findings, the teachers would more likely accept the assistance of the supervisor with little or no difficulty.

As previously indicated, teachers are usually the least informed regarding the results of educational R&D activities. This is not to say, however, that they are not interested. In fact, van der Eyken (1965) found that teachers often want someone to provide them with such results. Other studies show that the need has not been met due to the sometime esoteric nature of research reports (Klausmeier, 1972). This problem can be overcome through the redefinition of the role of the supervisor. In this redefinition, the supervisor could be made responsible for reading and interpreting current and relevant research findings. McElhinney (1968) suggested that the supervisor be assigned time to read, interpret and synthesize the results and disseminate these results to the teachers. Such a strategy could involve a regularly scheduled in-service program, as well as a publication which would include an easy-to-read summary of research reports. Bassett (1974) suggested that such a publication would be quite helpful for the teachers as compared to the highly technical articles that appear in most professional journals.

In summary, the above discussion has dealt with a new potential role for the public school instructional supervisor. This new role

has generally been referred to as that of a disseminator of research results. In actuality, it would go beyond just the role of an informal/formal disseminator. The requirements for skills in research/evaluation methodology are apparent, as is the ability to develop and direct formal in-service training programs and to prepare appropriate dissemination documents which would present research findings in an easy-to-read and concise format. With these new responsibilities, the instructional supervisor would indeed assume the role of an instructional leader in the school division. Another important result of assuming these new roles would be the bridging of the gap between the educational researchers and the practitioners. Bridging this gap is the key to a more effective relationship between the educational researcher and the practitioner and is considered a most necessary step in attempting to achieve the real goal of education--the best possible educational experience for today's youth.

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